

“Thank God I’ve watched E.R.,” was about all she could mutter, looking a bit worse for the wear, as she emerged from the building—holding a baby boy. The baby, Zuher Ahmed Mohowed, was not even an hour old.

Staff Sgt. Gina Gray, an AFN broadcast journalist attached to the 173d Airborne Brigade, found herself in the unusual position of playing doctor, nurse and midwife to a pregnant Iraqi woman, too poor to afford a trip to the hospital to give birth.

It happened while paratroopers of Battle Company, 2nd Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) were searching a house in Kirkuk. The Soldiers were asked by the home’s owner not to disturb one of the rooms. Further investigation with an interpreter only revealed that there was a ‘sick woman’ inside.

The commander in the area, trying to be sensitive to the owner’s wishes while still wanting to conduct a thorough search, sent for the only female soldier in the area—Gray.

Putting her video camera aside she approached the house, Gray was told to ‘See if everything was okay in there and oh, by the way, see if there are any weapons in the room while you’re at it.’

“I had no idea what to expect,” Gray said. “When I went in there the baby had just finished coming out. She, the mother, was just laying there in pain and the other women were wiping the baby down.”

Timing is everything they say, if that’s so then Gray’s is surely something. She entered room as the umbilical cord was about to be cut and they were attempting to extract the placenta. Within moments she stuck her head out the door, asked that no one come in and that someone fetch her a combat lifesaver’s bag.

“She was pretty surprised to see me, I think,” Gray said. “She saw me walk through the door. I mean think about it, here I am with a weapon and body armor and she’s just had a baby. I took everything off to let her know that I was there to help. They were more impressed when I took off my Kevlar and they saw my hair.”

The baby had literally just been born—he was a few moments old at the most.

“They cut the cord and got the placenta out and that’s when I called for the combat life saver’s bag and the medic,” she said. “The mother was trying to push out the placenta and they wanted me to help by putting my hands up there. That finally got out and I noticed she was torn pretty bad.”

About this time the medic arrived with his medical kit. Spc. Anthony Duarte had helped deliver a baby once as a civilian but this was his first in Iraq and his first under such austere conditions.

“I walked in there about the time the placenta was out,” Duarte said. “I gave her some pain medication, some morphine, and checked her vitals.”

“I just held her hand, tried talking to her, tried to calm her down,” Gray said. “I guess in Iraqi the culture is different. I know in America when you have a baby they wipe it down and hand it to you. But here she had the baby, they wiped him off, bound him up and she still hasn’t held the baby, that I know of.”

While language and cultural barriers may be hampering the process of rebuilding in much of Iraq, between two mothers they had no such effect.

“If you’ve ever had a baby you understand what pain is,” Gray, the mother of a 3 year old boy herself, said. “That’s a universal thing. I knew what she was going through. She was just in pain, I knew. I could sympathize with her. I saw that she had torn and I know how much that hurts. I tried to clean that up a little bit but I think she just wanted someone there. She just held my hand.”

“I just did what I could do,” Duarte said. “I talked through the interpreter and was able to give her some medication and then get an IV into her. They’re going to be fine.”

The baby boy, Zuher, is doing fine.

“I just didn’t want all of you coming in there,” she said with a grin. “I didn’t want any of the tough infantry guys fainting.”